

#### Introduction

This framework is a tool to help education providers consider good practice in supporting regional, rural and remote (RRR) students. It provides a structure to reflect on current practice and enhance support services, informed by what others are doing and saying.

Tertiary students from, or living in, RRR areas can face extra challenges. As a group they experience lower educational attainment rates compared to those in metropolitan areas. The <u>Napthine Review</u><sup>1</sup> recommended a better quality and range of student support services, and more holistic help for RRR students.

Different definitions exist, but RRR is used here as an umbrella term to characterise non-metropolitan areas of Australia. Students from outside of capital cities or high population centres are considered to be RRR. For this framework, students who have moved <u>from RRR locations</u> to more populated locations, as well as those residing <u>in RRR areas are regarded as RRR. Within this broad category, students will have different characteristics and needs. Some will experience multiple barriers to learning, contributing to the complexity and diversity of this group.</u>

This framework is for higher education and vocational education and training providers - publicly or privately funded. It can be used by staff in student support or equity roles, as well as those in teaching and leadership positions. Many improvements to support services for RRR students will also benefit others. Some services for other identified equity groups may cross over with those suitable for RRR students. A general trend towards assisting students on a more individualised basis, will assist ALL students.

A community of practice model within and between education providers is encouraged, sharing more examples of practice and insights gained from experiences. This framework provides a prompt for each education provider to develop strategies to suit their student profiles.

#### **THANK YOU**

The insights of over 100 education experts and providers of higher education and vocational education, as well as 70 RRR students from around the country have been used to develop this resource. We are grateful for their generous contributions. The framework is adapted from the development and piloting of an Assessment of university support services for regional and remote students on transition to university by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) in 2018. Thanks go to ACER for their assistance.



1. Culture



2. Resourcing



3. Belonging



4. Engagement



5. Knowledge

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Leadership

**Embedding support** 

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Support for online and distance students

Monitoring of needs and responses

Prioritising resources and funding

**Ongoing improvement** 

**Sharing of good practice** 

A good practice framework for supporting regional, rural and remote tertiary students

# **Element 1 - CULTURE**



Т	hinking about	How do you?	Could you?
	a. Partnerships with students - RRR students' knowledge, skills, experiences and cultures are valued	Collect input from RRR students in structured ways	Increase direct representation on committees, as student ambassadors, in outreach teams, and expand consultation through interviews, focus groups, RRR project committees
		Support student-led initiatives	Assist student leadership of groups, events or projects
		Develop student agency	Build RRR student confidence and ownership of issues
	b. Leadership - whole organisation is committed to and involved in student centred approaches	Build RRR into planning	Include RRR considerations in organisational processes and/or develop explicit RRR strategies
		Put students at the centre	Focus on students first and consider designing with them
		Equip staff	Build staff capability to play their part to support students in different ways
		Convey messages	Reinforce student support is everyone's business through leaders' messages

#### **Students Say...**

"It helps if tutors know where I'm from and what that means. But many have never been outside Brisbane. They don't realise work never stops for us."

"Students from CALD or with a disability get support, but RRR fly under the radar - it's exhausting."



"Being able to balance work and study is just the best thing because I love working. Having the flexibility to do both is key." 4

# **Element 1 - CULTURE**



Т	hinking about	How do you?	Could you?
	c. Embedding support - services integrated into student life and teaching and learning practice	Find multiple touchpoints	Integrate support into places and platforms where students already engage
		Join up services	Provide support services that are more seamless from students' perspective
		Make support a normal inclusion	Eliminate the stigma of asking for help by 'building in, not bolting on'
	d. Responsiveness - flexibility and receptiveness to individual needs in student services	Recognise individuality	Take a personalised approach to support and learning, recognising the diverse needs of RRR students
		Implement new ways	Try innovative ways to support RRR students, including through technology or peer-to-peer support
		Dedicate resources for RRR students	Allocate specific staff who understand the RRR context
		Timetable	Schedule classes to take account of RRR students' travel, work and other responsibilities
		Provide concessions	Review requests for special consideration in the context of RRR students' individual challenges

"Teachers don't get that funerals can last weeks. Even for non-Indigenous people it can be a drawn out in small communities. Just the travel to get home." "Some students are less verbal or confident, but their knowledge is great. Our trainers then do things in other ways. Students' different styles are accepted."

"A dedicated team to look after RRR students and make regular contact would be great."



# **Educators Say...**



"When our remote First Nations students come to residential school they help us plan - how much one-on-one with teachers, when do they need the computer lab, when will they see mentors?"

(Small Metro and Regional VET provider)

"Staff induction is mostly about knowing our students, it's our signature pedagogy. Lecturers can see online if students are first in family, their age, educational background, a map of where they all come from. Reviewing this helps them consider how that impacts each student."

(Regional university)

"We're implementing a connected, holistic support model, combining academic and wellbeing support. We're forcing integration by relocating services together, restructuring our org chart, to join up services for students."

(Large Metro and Regional VET provider)

"Our management system has an individual record for each apprentice or trainee. If concerns are logged, it alerts the team leader, CEO and admin manager. Then the field officer with a relationship with the apprentice is deployed to support them."

(Group training organisation, VET sector)

"We integrate learning advisors into core subjects where we know it's needed. We've been building student support services into our curriculum for a long time, it's normal. We're smaller, people know each other, it's easy to work collaboratively."

(Regional university)



"Normalising support means students understand it's a strength to access it, rather than a weakness. We encourage them to access support early, not leave it to when they're failing. The message is 'you're all going to need this'."



#### **RRR representative on student board**

By including student leaders from regional campuses on the Student Board, The University of Notre Dame Australia in Fremantle considers RRR perspectives in organisationwide planning. As a university statutory committee, equivalent within the governance structure to other executive management committees, minutes are shared with University Directors and Trustees.

Renae Liaros is a Student Board member for RRR students, doing a Diploma of Nursing via a blended model supported by the Broome campus, where she lives in far north Western Australia. She says it's no talkfest. "What we decide impacts on all students. We're given the agenda and previous meeting minutes beforehand. I consult with other remote students before meetings. You can write a paper about issues or raise things at the meeting too.

It's important to have a student voice from here because we don't have the same personal support as people might in cities. I don't have extended family here to help juggle kids, work and study. I wouldn't be able to do it without the flexibility of online and block classes."

The university's Pro Vice Chancellor, Student Experience says the Reconciliation campus has operated in Broome since 1999.

We work hard to not have a 'them and us' attitude, so that RRR students don't feel like second rate citizens compared with those in the city. Our Broome students can feel like part of the whole university through direct representation on the Student Board. We should empower all students to have expectations of high-quality support, and this is one way to help achieve that.

Pro Vice Chancellor, Student Experience, The University of Notre Dame Australia





#### Whole of university strategy for regions

Regional campuses are central to La Trobe University's identity, mission and purpose and have a vital role in the future of their regional and surrounding rural communities, increasing access to higher education and research while simultaneously facilitating strong partnerships with schools, TAFE, local government and industry.

La Trobe has developed a Strategy for Regional Victoria which aims to increase the number of students supported by regional campuses by providing a 'wide front door'. They work with TAFE to provide seamless pathways, focus campus delivery where there is good student demand and workforce need, and offer a wide range of online and mixed mode courses to expand choice and increase access for students in regional, rural and remote areas.

Through their Regional Connect strategy, La Trobe delivers engaging on-campus and virtual activities to online students studying at their regional campuses, tailored to be relevant to their local context. Regional Connect activities and initiatives are contributed to by all parts of the university. Activities include social events, peer connection activities, introductions to local businesses, industry mentoring, academic and employability workshops and public lectures.

We talk to students, we partner with them, we find out what they need. We recognise that lots of our students have commitments and issues outside their studies where they might need to hit pause. Academics and professional staff work together to help them deal with challenges. That's our job. Everybody steps in. That's part of the university's underlying culture and values.

Deputy Director, Advising & Success, La Trobe University



# **Element 2 - RESOURCING**



TI	hinking about	How do you?	Could you?
	a. Financial assistance – RRR students are assisted to access scholarships, grants and funding	Target funding	Offer financial help to RRR students to meet their needs
		Introduce and broker funding sources	Identify and actively connect RRR students to sources of financial help
		Develop help resources	Compile 'tips' or sample applications to help RRR students navigate paperwork
		Provide employment assistance	Facilitate students finding work – on/off-campus, part-time, on holidays, after graduating
	b. Wellbeing support – skilled support and counselling staff available to address needs of RRR students	Maintain skills	Ensure staff have current knowledge of the mental health issues that students experience
		Offer help in students' settings	Go to students, instead of them coming to you
		Refer to greater expertise	Ensure staff recognise when specialised support is needed and ask for help

#### **Students Say...**

"Regular check-ins with RRR students should be a standard part of pastoral care."

"I offered to be a mentor at the residential college. A scholarship was created so I could live there. Later they made a rural women's scholarship."

"My move represented six hours' distance. I was like a foreigner in the city. The support that international students get should be available."



"I have no family or friends here. There's some problems I'd like to discuss with a counsellor from a rural background."

# **Element 2 - RESOURCING**



٦	Thinking about	How do you?	Could you?
	c. Academic support - skilled staff available to assist learning for RRR students	Provide academic support	Provide support where and when RRR students need it, including after hours
		Take pre-emptive action	Recognise warning signs and respond when the risk of failure is increasing for RRR students
		Provide career guidance	Tailor career guidance to RRR students' field of study, preferred employment outcomes and locations
	d. Accommodation assistance - housing help provided for RRR students	Prioritise help	Give relocating RRR students preference for accommodation assistance
		Diagnose need	Identify what's important for RRR students - cost, proximity, safety and security, flexibility, staying in place
		Partner	Work with accommodation providers for sufficient, appropriate, joined-up services

"Having someone who looks after RRR students is a big positive. We have different issues, like with technology. I know there's someone I can call."

> "It was hard to find scholarships. Many were for other courses. There weren't any for remote students to help cover living expenses."

"Priority accommodation is a big need. I got a cheaper on campus residence. We now have RRR advocates in each hall but that's run by students."

"I would have liked some help with all the Centrelink processes and forms."



# **Educators Say...**



"Wellbeing officers now work after hours in student residences. Most issues come up after five, so shifts are now 3.00 to 11.00pm. They're on hand during students' downtime. They cook for students, drop off encouraging notes, bring chocolate treats."

(Non-university higher education regional provider)

"Mental health needs are growing for all students, not just RRR. We're referring more to expert counselling. 'Telehealth' appointments help students if confidentiality is a problem in small centres. Everyone knows everyone!"

(Metro university with regional campuses)

"Our undergraduate accommodation guarantee is for all applicants, wherever they come from. There's still a cost barrier, the least expensive on-campus housing is over \$200 per week."

(Metro university)



"We started 'Adopt-a-Student' a year ago, finding sponsors to fund students struggling during COVID. We support them and even give them treats."



# Flexible timetabling assists with accommodation costs

Students attending the University of South Australia's Whyalla campus come from a wide geographic region and often travel long distances to attend classes – sometimes up to 3 hours each way. To minimise the impact of travel time on students' lives, timetables are organised so that students only to need to be on campus for 1-2 days each week. If students need to be on campus for 2 days, classes are scheduled for consecutive days so students can stay overnight rather than travel to Whyalla twice in a week.

To reduce the financial impost of being away from home, low-cost accommodation is available to students. The Whyalla campus has 11 units, each with 8 rooms, that can be booked on a casual or permanent basis.

Our timetabling approach helps students' work-life balance and is an important attraction and retention strategy. It's a point of difference for us as universities are unable to timetable that way in the city due to the larger numbers

of classes required. We have that flexibility and our students really appreciate it. We are starting to run more intensives as well. Some students prefer that model where there is a week of intensives every term and they don't have to attend campus as much in between times.

Regional Manager, Whyalla Campus

# Investing in culturally safe environments for remote students

At Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, 90% of students are from remote or very remote areas and 95% are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin. Many qualifications are delivered almost entirely 'out bush'. But for those students who come to campus for 2-week blocks, many are easily 1500km from home and for some English is their third or fourth language.

The Institute has a "both ways" learning philosophy, providing culturally safe learning environment within a Westernised education system. It prioritises resources to cater specifically for the cultural and academic needs of its students. Some

of the services provided may seem unconventional, but these are the supports that are important for the students to attend and complete. Services include:

- On-campus accommodation and food provided by chefs who understand specific dietary needs
- Dedicated student travel team to book and charter flights for students to travel to and from their communities
- Dedicated mentors and tutors providing face to face support
- A childcare centre and primary school on campus

We do spend a higher proportion than other providers on admin and corporate expenses. But this is an investment in the students, not a cost. You can see the return on investment in terms of completions and student outcomes. As support increases, retention increases.

Acting Dean, VET Division, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education

# **Element 3 - BELONGING**



Т	hinking about	How do you?	Could you?
	a. Connection and identity - is respected and proactively forged	Make RRR positive	Avoid stereotypes, include affirming and accurate messages about RRR in lessons, speeches, marketing
		Achieve inclusivity	Include RRR students more and help them to build connections with other students
		Build self-efficacy	Build students' confidence and identity as a student, particularly if first-in-family
	b. Support to settle into study - transition and first year support is provided for RRR	Understand RRR transitions	Build knowledge of transition experiences of RRR students into planning
		Run RRR orientations	Use orientation to address specific initial needs of RRR students
	students	Familiarise relocating students	Provide extra guidance to help RRR students settle into new environments
	<b>c. Mentoring -</b> is available for RRR students	Connect RRR students	Facilitate connections between RRR students with similar 'lived experience'
		Establish supportive relationships	Prepare and support mentors or buddies for their role, connect students with peers

#### **Students Say...**

"Tutors are interested in what I say about being in a rural area, about things others haven't experienced. So they understand the difficulties I face."

"You often feel talked at, instead of with, in classes. More discussion would be great. Talking with other students would help me belong."



"Coming to a big city is overwhelming. Basic things for city kids are daunting for me. It's intense, crowded and noisy. I'm still scared of public transport."

# **Element 3 - BELONGING**



Thinking about		How do you?	Could you?
	d. Indigenous perspectives and cultural competency - are present in service delivery	Respect knowledge and traditions	Embrace Indigenous cultures throughout your organisation, not just for First Nations students
		Invest in cultural competency	Actively develop staff's understanding of the importance of culture
		Integrate culture into practice	Learn from and apply Indigenous cultures in teaching and learning
		Provide welcoming environments	Make your organisation accessible and inclusive for First Nations students
	e. Community outreach and engagement - is undertaken in areas where RRR students reside	Partner with RRR communities	Work closely with RRR services and community groups to benefit students
		Develop deep community relationships	Invest in long-term, meaningful engagement with RRR communities beyond transactions

"It'd be good to buddy with a new or experienced RRR student - both have something to offer, even if they don't have all the answers."

> "A specific RRR orientation, with a locally based mentor or support person would be ideal."

"If you feel you don't belong, you focus on trying to fit in instead of studying."



"It made a big difference that they made us feel connected to Country."

# **Educators Say...**



"There's a one-on-one consultation for students during orientation – at least 45 minutes to talk through support services. We learn about their barriers – internet access, transport, workplace issues."

(Non-university higher education provider)

"We're now engaging all students virtually during orientation. The online structure helps make sense of what can be overwhelming in person. Practical support is 90% of the focus."

(Large metro and regional VET provider)

"Part of belonging is knowing that people like you have been there before. Mentoring programs are critical. Buddy students up beforehand so they have someone when they arrive. In the UK you have a student and a staff buddy to guide you through."

(Education Expert)

"It's great to work with Elders in Indigenous communities. There's support for people educating themselves. We're forming partnerships with Elders as cotenants of remote learning centres - that's great community ownership."

(Dual sector education provider)



"We have induction resources for family members to help them provide support. It spreads our reach to supporters and influencers. We're planning an 'invite your family' weekend once students settle in and feel ownership over the campus."



# Structured first year program beginning prior to enrolment

Staff within Macquarie University's Walanga Muru unit engage across the university to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students grow academically, personally and culturally. The university has structured programs which students participate in during different stages in their study. One of the great successes for First Nations students from rural and remote areas has been Walanga Muru's first year program.

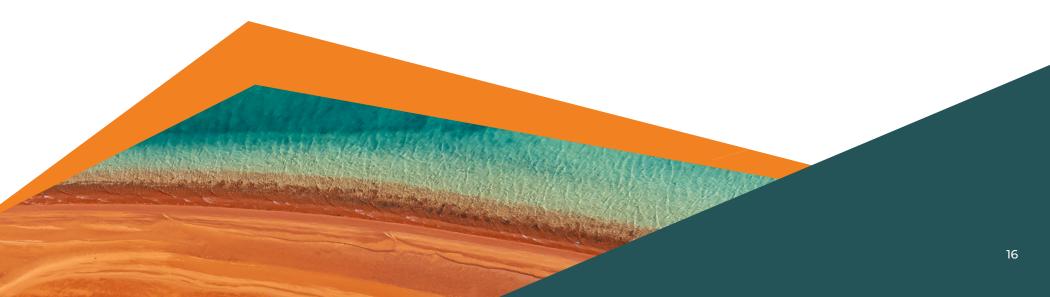
A dedicated first year coordinator provides case management for the students, starting with scheduling pre-yarn sessions with every student to assist them with their enrolment and discuss their context and needs so the university knows how to support the student once they commence. Prior to commencing, First Nations students attend a three-day camp offsite to orient students to Macquarie and get them ready for study.

All first-year students are given mentors who connect with students throughout the year. A culture and wellbeing officer coordinates a series of events for the first-year students to help them build their cultural identity and identity as a student and learn to cope with the challenges of university. A weekly community lunch provides an opportunity for students to interact with faculty members and other students.

Retention of First Nations students has increased dramatically since the introduction of the first-year program, from 68% in 2018 to 91% in 2020.

We don't talk about support – we talk about engaging with students; walking beside them, giving them a sense of belonging in the university.

Pro-vice chancellor, Macquarie University





# Giving back to RRR communities in times of crisis

During and after the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires that hit Victoria and NSW, Wodonga TAFE took prompt action to support the Upper Murray communities evacuate and recover from the disaster.

The Community Services & Health Department delivered activities for children in the Fire Evacuation Centre, while free catering was made available for volunteers and evacuees in association with Foodshare. Accommodation was also provided free of charge for fire fighters and police who were working hard to save lives, homes, livestock, wildlife and the environment.

Wodonga TAFE staff supported the community New Year's Eve party on 31 January 2020, assisting to bring some joy to families who had suffered throughout this ordeal.

They were able to utilise granted bushfire relief funding to develop purpose-built courses, such as chainsaw training, which were aimed at assisting affected communities to recover. Their Horticulture Department donated more than 2,000 plants to the Upper Murray Community Recovery Hub for conservation efforts and continue to grow seedlings for the region to assist with ongoing recovery.

Engagement activities like these demonstrate that we have a genuine interest in the future of our communities. By building trust and respect amongst local residents, current and future students are more likely to identify with and engage with us as their education provider.

Manager Community and Industry Engagement, Wodonga TAFE

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#### **Element 4 - ENGAGEMENT**



TI	hinking about	How do you?	Could you?
	<ul> <li>a. Proactive</li> <li>and specialised</li> <li>communications</li> <li>- are targeted and timed for RRR</li> <li>students' needs</li> </ul>	Establish RRR specific content	Reflect RRR students' own context in messages to them
		Schedule communications	Pre-empt needs or schedule and stagger information for maximum impact
		Know stress points	Consider extra stressors for RRR students – relocating, harvest, community events, travel
		Personalise contacts	Provide a staff member for RRR students to know personally, ask questions of
	b. Student awareness of support services – messaging raises knowledge and awareness	Use multiple channels and cross promotion	Find the right mix of communication methods to reach RRR students
		Embrace new methods	Use emerging ways to raise and monitor students' understanding of available support

#### **Students Say...**

"Online information is helpful – rather than phoning people and getting different answers from everyone."

"For face to face, you're likely to miss classes because of the distance. And the more online learning, the less connected you are to your course and college." "They're telling us about support all the time in lectures or emails. With new subjects they'll say what support is relevant. Saying it early normalises it."



"Some people reach out when they reach crisis point. I won't ask for help, but if it's offered in a personal way, I'll accept it."

#### **Element 4 - ENGAGEMENT**



TH	ninking about	How do you?	Could you?
	c. Online support services - RRR students engage with support services using technology	Form different connections	Balance online interaction and person-to-person services to offer effective support
		Use new initiatives	Use emerging approaches or online solutions to help support your cohort
		Meet obligations	Continue to meet support requirements if using third party access
	d. Support for online or distance students - relationships are built with those not attending in person	Build and maintain relationships	Combat the sense of isolation many online students experience
		Replicate on-campus advantages	Deliver on-campus experiences online
		Personalise learning	Leverage the more individualised approach to learning that online offers
		Support learning in place	Facilitate access to facilities, social contact and support with local study hubs or mobile services

"Reliable internet access is needed for downloads, uploads, meetings. Students drop out if they rely on mobile phones. Access is not equal to the city."

"There should be specific RRR student advisors you can go to for anything. That's going to be easier for students."

"A chat feature for RRR students - that'd be great. Especially for people working full time who don't have time to wait. Chat is quick and easy."

"Some students never look at emails – they like text or social media. We need communication in various formats."



# **Educators Say...**



"Online is the future for students but they still want the full customer experience. We've created a new role - a Student Life Officer. Their role is to create experiences for online, including RRR students, who find it difficult to come to events on campus."

(Non-university higher education provider)

"Building a strong social media interaction, means we only email students occasionally. Our student life coordinators are young and graduated from here, so they get the student experience, plus our vision."

(Non-university higher education provider)

"A lot of (RRR) students want to stay at home with families. We've designed our courses for online delivery and try to have a physical presence within 200km."

(Regional university)

"We travel to remote communities for 6-7 weeks per term. When we're not there we support via phone and email. We have people versed in culture, who understand Indigenous culture - people who can form relationships so that students feel comfortable to contact them."

(VET provider)



Each student advisor knows their students, those who might struggle and need regular checks along the way. We have drop-in sessions for students. The Zoom Room is open and students can go into break out rooms to talk to advisors. It's about the relationships."



#### Innovative online support tools

Central Queensland University (CQU) draws most of its students from regional, rural and remote areas. Many students prefer to stay in or close to their communities and choose to study online or at one of the regional campuses or study hubs available. As such, CQU has developed some innovative online tools to support its students. For example:

Dare to be Deadly is a support and wellbeing program designed to ensure that Indigenous regional, rural, and remote students at CQU are connected to services, culturally appropriate advice and advocacy and a range of resources to support their individual learning journeys.

The program consists of staged engagements, timely supports such as free academic tutoring and cultural connections (e.g. yarning circles) that empower students to remain resilient, focussed on success in their studies within a culturally safe space. Central to the implementation of this program is the use of the <u>Stay Strong app</u>, an evidence based tool designed to address the mental health and wellbeing concerns of First Nations Australians using a cross cultural approach. The Indigenous Student Engagement team uses the app as a way of engaging students and supporting them to identify what they need to stay on track with their studies.

Countdown to CQUni is a single onboarding platform for VET and university students which creates a personalised orientation experience. It includes a suite of self-paced, engaging online resources that introduce students to the key components of student life (e.g. thinking like a student, making space for study, balancing life, work, and study).

It is made available for students to access before commencing their studies and program specific orientation activities (and beyond). The resource provides a slow release of student-framed information, practical tips, and resources to assist students in understanding how they can plan for and create the right conditions to succeed in their studies. It also connects students to support services and foundational first year academic knowledge and processes. Countdown to CQUni has been designed inclusively and is a companion piece to other specific orientation activities, including Orientation TV (OTV) and optional Orientation Boost sessions (customisable to individual needs) that focus on the provision of 'just in time' support, tailored to individual circumstances.

Student access and equity manager, CQU



#### **Support provided to distance learners in-place**

Country University Centres (CUCs) are dedicated learning and study spaces designed for regional people by regional people. Students living in regional, rural and remote areas who are enrolled in any Australian university have free access to high-speed Internet, modern technology, and face-to-face wrap around support provided by local CUC staff. This includes wellbeing, technology, administrative, academic support, and access to a local learning community.

In addition to being regional, many CUC students are often their first-in-family to attend university, are non-school leavers, have had a break from education, are balancing fulltime work with study, have caring responsibilities, or a combination of these factors. These factors influence every student differently and can combine to create unique challenges for each student to succeed in higher education. To support these students, the CUC 'meets students where they are' and delivers face-to-face support that is tailored to the needs of each individual student.

The focus on personalised face-to-face support provided by CUC staff is highly valued by students. In the 2021 Student Experience Survey, 92% of students indicated they are more likely to continue with their studies because of the help they received from the CUC, 94% of students believe the CUC has made it easier to stay, study or work in their community, and 91% of CUC students felt that using the CUC helped to improve their academic results.

CEO, Country University Centres



# **Element 5 - KNOWLEDGE**



Т	hinking about	How do you?	Could you?
	a. Monitoring needs and responses - data on RRR students' needs and engagement is collected and used	Identify RRR students, their contexts and needs	Use systems to assist early intervention or targeting of resources
		Track service requests and responses	Connect outcomes with requests to show accountability and impact
		Align services with student milestones	Use systems help to trigger support when it's most needed
		Measure students' views of services	Understand student attitudes about support services, beyond awareness and use
	<ul> <li>b. Prioritising</li> <li>resources</li> <li>and funding –</li> <li>decisions are</li> <li>informed by</li> <li>strategy and</li> </ul>	Gather evidence	Identify data showing impact of services for RRR students through analytics, consultations, surveys, research, evaluations
		Monitor student lifecycles	Understand and support students' changing needs, initially and throughout enrolment
	evidence	Use planning cycles	Influence greater consideration of RRR issues in long-term organisational planning

#### **Students Say...**

"If a student makes a query about switching courses or dropping out, then support should automatically kick in."



"When I enrolled, I filled in a questionnaire about what support I needed. It asked what they should focus on – from parking vouchers to financial support."

# **Element 5 - KNOWLEDGE**



TI	hinking about	How do you?	Could you?
	a. Monitoring needs and responses - data on RRR students' needs and engagement is collected and used	Review data for improvement	See trends and changes through data on RRR student experiences
		Build data into planning	Leverage RRR student data to inform your annual planning processes
		Create evidence base for change	Source the hard data that will back up your proposals for change
	b. Prioritising resources and funding – decisions are informed by strategy and evidence	Join networks	Connect with other practitioners or find existing RRR focused practitioner groups
		Establish cross discipline teams	Spread ownership of student support issues across teams
		Share with colleagues	Try lunch learning sessions, conference presentations, webinars
		Benchmark performance	Find opportunities to share what works by comparing results with others

#### **Students Say...**

"There's a lot of opportunity, particularly for lecturers and tutors, to find out about the student's background – what their personal situation is."



"There needs to be an understanding of different types of RRR. While they might understand regional, remote is very different." (Parent of student)

# **Educators Say...**

"There's a trend for using technology to collect info on what students are doing and how they're doing it. Our learning management system is 'big data', collecting real time info on student engagement, which quickly informs teaching and student support."

(Regional university)

"Most attrition happens in the apprentice's first 100 days or in their last stage. That's when we're on the front foot for problems. We track a lot of data - completions, cancellations, home post code, to gauge where and when support is needed. And use feedback from students, host employers and RTOs."

(Regional group training organisation)

"Greater collaboration between universities is needed. All want to widen participation. Best practice networks with other providers should be supported. Now is the right time with the increased focus on RRR in HEPPP."

(Metro university)

"We do a student experience survey every October. The top support students reach out to is their lecturer, then pastoral care and counselling support – that's consistent over 5 years. Our weekly counselling report shows the top issue is always anxiety and life stress, even before COVID."

(Non-university higher education provider)

"We started a "Student Experience Community of Practice" across our TAFE Network. We discuss support models, trends, compare student survey results. It gives us the structure to solve problems together."

(Large metro and regional VET provider)



"We target resources to students' needs, listening to them about what they need, whether it's support during placements, funding for technology, food cards, petrol cards, professional accreditation fees. We direct help to where students say they need it most."



#### **Using analytics to target communications**

Charles Sturt University has developed sophisticated learning analytics and communications systems to ensure they understand their RRR students and can provide a bespoke response to their needs.

The Always On Retention Campaign is a series of scaled, communication interventions delivered at regular intervals to RRR students which are triggered when learning analytics indicate a student is disengaging from their studies. The program is delivered in collaboration between academic and student support teams. When students get a warning they are guided to build their own personalised support plan, which responds to the issues they are facing. Student support then works with the teaching staff to respond to the student's particular needs.

The university has also developed a highly personalised student portal, providing just-in-time blogs and social media messages, which are customised for each student, based on their profile.

Everyone receives tailored information, that is relevant to them. It is important that you don't single out students as less likely to succeed. With our approach, they don't know they're receiving a call because they're in a specific postcode – that's really important so no one feels stigmatised.

Executive Director, Student Services, Charles Sturt University





#### A collegial network for sharing

As the professional body for equity practitioners in the higher education sector, Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia (EPHEA) promotes cultural change within education providers, and fosters an environment which values and respects diversity. EPHEA has over 800 members across Australia and New Zealand.

In 2021 EPHEA conducted a survey of equity practitioners which found that higher education institutions were focussing more on support to regional, rural and remote (RRR) students in response to new national policies and funding guidelines. By sharing results, members learnt from what changes others were making, including:

- Broadening of representation on internal HEPPP governance committees, such as the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff
- Knowledge sharing and coordination across various university units that have responsibility over Indigenous, LSES and Regional student success

- Expansion of school outreach and widening participation initiatives into regional, rural and remote communities
- Increased financial commitment to scholarships, that include accommodation, for regional students
- Increased funding allocated to regional and Indigenous cohorts.

EPHEA has been supporting this focus by providing a collegial network for sharing professional knowledge, research and practice amongst equity practitioners. The biennial EPHEA conference (held since 1992) provides an opportunity for equity practitioners to come together and workshop practical ideas on improving participation and retention of under-represented groups in higher education, including students from regional, rural and remote areas.

President, Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia (EPHEA)



